



## A developmental evaluation of the respecting diversity in our community programme

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*The Speedwell Trust*  
*A Developmental Evaluation of the Respecting Diversity in  
our Community Programme*

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report is a developmental evaluation of the Speedwell Trust *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme. *Respecting Diversity in our Community* is a pilot initiative within the overall spectrum of programmes offered by the organisation. Uniquely, it has been strategically developed in partnership with participating schools to include teachers as co-facilitators and, over the past year, it has been delivered to a cohort of primary school children in Key Stage 2.

The mission statement for the Speedwell Trust clarifies that the organisation *exists to encourage children to respect themselves, each other and the world we share* (Speedwell, 2009). This commitment is enacted through a series of school-based programmes that have been designed to enable children to:

- learn about each other's traditions, understand and respect differences and value what they hold in common;
- view it as normal to cross inter-cultural barriers;
- develop a vision of a shared future where everyone is equally valued.

The remit of each programme is articulated through a collective series of cumulative and progressive objectives that are intended to provide children with opportunities to:

- meet young people from another school, learn each other's names and begin to share ideas around the core issues;
- develop skills, knowledge and confidence to understand their own identity and to respect and understand the identity of others;
- identify symbols linked to Northern Ireland and their origin;
- explore the differences and similarities between traditions, groups and different communities in Northern Ireland;
- acquire an increased understanding of the two main traditions and other significant cultures who contribute to life in Northern Ireland.

(Speedwell, 2009)

Additionally, it is anticipated that the project will develop links between schools beyond the teachers and pupils to include parents and others involved in school life.

This evaluation has been undertaken with due regard to three individual, yet inherently inter-connected, circumstances:

1. The *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme is now at the end of a pilot phase. It is timely, therefore, to reflect on its design, implementation and contribution to good relations, and to consider possibilities for its future development.
2. The revised curriculum (introduced on a phased basis between 2007-2010) makes specific provision for citizenship education at each stage of a pupil's education. In the primary sector, this includes opportunities for pupils to explore the concepts of diversity and good relations.
3. The Department of Education (DE) is currently undertaking a review of its Community Relations policy, including its core funding scheme. At the time of writing, the outcome of this review is unclear; although Departmental guidance has made reference to a possible policy agenda that includes the wider concepts of diversity, the recurrent need to focus on ongoing divisions between the two communities is also acknowledged. However, it is anticipated that any re-constitution of community relations policy – and, indeed, any corresponding re-formulation of the funding process - may have significant implications for the remit, delivery and longevity of school-based programmes.

## **2.0 THE POLICY CONTEXT**

The *Respecting Diversity* programme has been developed as the policy and pedagogical parameters around which formal education is defined continue to evolve. In the history of Northern Ireland, children in primary schools are, arguably, part of the first generation not to experience the worst excesses of the conflict. This does not presume, however, that the vestiges of the 'Troubles' have gone. Recent sectarian attacks provide a stark reminder that political tensions can and do still have the capacity to disrupt the relative stability of a more peaceful society. In addition, recent survey findings suggest that while young people tend to respond positively to the option of greater educational and

social integration, the number who continue to perceive that religion will make a difference to how people feel about each other remains high (NIYLT, 2008).

Although described as *a society in transition towards more peaceful, inclusive and democratic structures*, community relations in Northern Ireland is undertaken within a society that is still largely characterised by divisions (Cairns & Hewstone, 2002; Smith, 2003; OFMDFM, 2005). In particular, the educational infra-structure essentially remains segregated, both by school denomination and school achievement (Cairns & Hewstone, 2002; Gallagher, 2004). Recent figures indicate that, of a population of just over 320,000 primary and post primary pupils<sup>1</sup>, 5% currently attend an integrated school<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the numbers of pupils engaged in cross-community programmes have been routinely static. Overall, just under 20% of primary pupils and approximately 1.5% of post-primary pupils have participated in the Schools Community Relations Programme in the past year.

The contribution of education towards fostering a *culture of tolerance* as part of a *shared future* has been outlined in successive policy and consultation documents (DE, 1982, 1999, 2000; O'Connor et al., 2002; OFMDFM, 2005). Over time, efforts to promote greater social cohesion through education have been undertaken via a series of formal and informal initiatives, the most notable of which included: the introduction of the cross-curricular themes Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage (CH); the establishment of the Schools Community Relations Programme (SCRP) and the Community Relations Core Funding Scheme; and governmental support for the development of integrated schools (DE, 1982, 1987, 1989). Each of these has sought to contribute to creative, experimental approaches to teaching and learning, and to social and personal development by *promoting an ethos in the school which contributes to understanding and mutual respect for diversity in all its forms* (DE, 1999).

More recently, the revised curriculum emphasises its core aim to *empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives* (CCEA, 2007). It is intended that this aim will be fulfilled through three inter-dependent and overlapping objectives that should provide young people with

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<sup>1</sup> Including special schools

<sup>2</sup> DE Research and Statistics Branch: NI School Census 2006/07

opportunities to develop as: an individual; a contributor to society; and a contributor to the economy and environment (CCEA, 2007). Within the framework of the curriculum, provision for citizenship education occupies a strategic position; from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 2, it is delivered through Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU), while at Key Stages 3 and 4, it is delivered through Local and Global Citizenship.

At primary level, the revised curriculum is characterised as six Areas of Learning, one of which is Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU), with a focus that includes emotional development, social skills and mutual understanding in the local and global community. The programme for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding comprises two strands:

1. Personal Understanding and Health;
2. Mutual Understanding in the Local and Global Community.

It is intended that each Area of Learning can be integrated through a *connected learning* approach; this provides greater scope for cross-curricular activity and enables teachers to build on previous learning so that children have the opportunity to explore issues and themes in progressive detail.

Within this environment of ongoing educational, social and political policy reform, the rationale for the *Respecting Diversity* programme is underpinned by three fundamental guiding principles: the value of engagement (both formal and informal) with 'others' at a young age; the role of inter-group contact as a means to begin to address attitudes and behaviour that may tend towards stereotype and/or prejudice; and the short to longer term understandings and skills that such educational opportunities can nurture.

It is therefore timely to undertake a developmental evaluation that considers the *Respecting Diversity* programme within the formal education framework of the new curriculum, and within the context of broader social and cultural change. Individually and collectively, these factors may inform the future developmental strategy of the programme.

### 3.0 THE ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

The Speedwell Trust was established in 1991, with a core remit to bring together Catholic and Protestant primary school children through curriculum-based programmes. Speedwell is a voluntary organisation, based in Parkanaur Forest Park near Dungannon in the west of the province. As an organisation, Speedwell facilitates a range of programmes for schools; these can be characterised as programmes for environmentalism and biodiversity, and programmes for community relations education.

The strategic aims of the organisation are:

- To deliver a range of community relations and environmental awareness programmes to primary school children;
- To develop and extend the range of programmes delivered;
- To network and develop strategic partnerships with other groups and organisations;
- To build the capacity and sustainability of the organisation.

Within the divided society of Northern Ireland, Speedwell nurtures a philosophy of giving *children the opportunity to learn about each other's traditions, understand and respect their differences and recognise the values that they hold in common*. It is a participative approach founded in learning environments where the 'normality' of crossing inter-cultural barriers becomes a routine element of school (and beyond school) life.

Since its inception in 1991, the Speedwell Trust has facilitated community relations and environmental programmes for over 150,000 children. Historically, the work of Speedwell has sometimes tended to be inadvertently associated with programmes perceived to have a predominant environmental focus. In recent years, however, the organisation has sought to enhance its school partnerships through dedicated programmes that have an explicit community relations remit. This is a notable organisational development; as the constitution, profile and purpose of education continues to change, Speedwell has sought to evolve along a compatible continuum that will optimise its capacity to strengthen existing and forge new partnerships with schools.

In 2008-2009, Speedwell offered five primary school programmes. Three of these were focused community relations programmes and the remaining two reflected the organisation's legacy of work in environmentalism and bio-diversity. The programmes are:

**1. Respecting Diversity:** This programme, developed for Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils, has three inter-related and progressive components:

- (i) *Friends and Feelings* (school-based)
- (ii) *Respecting Diversity* (school-based)
- (iii) *Comparing Diversity* (Parkanaur)

In this programme, children have the opportunity to explore the concepts of friendship, emotions and diversity. In line with the new curriculum, activities are strongly play-based, allowing issues to be explored in a relaxed environment.

**2. Respecting Diversity in our Community:** This programme is delivered to pupils in Key Stage 2; it has four inter-related components that focus on:

- (i) *Our Identity* (school-based)
- (ii) *Christian Diversity* (Parkanaur and church based)
- (iii) *Community Identity* (school-based)
- (iv) *Symbols through Orienteering* (Parkanaur)

The programme is a developmental extension of work undertaken in Key Stage 1, involving further exploration of key issues through a series of progressive activities that culminates in a visit to the four main churches (Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Methodist and Catholic).

**3. Diversity in Sport:** This also is a Key Stage 2 programme, with three core components:

- (i) *Games played with a ball* (school-based)
- (ii) *Games played with a stick* (school-based)



(iii) *Sporting Diversity (Paraknaur)*

This programme focuses on the diverse and common aspects of various sports, including gaelic, soccer, rugby, hockey, hurling and camogie. Accompanying activities include a sports trail and a quiz.

**4. Bio-diversity Education Programmes:**

The bio-diversity education programmes are designed for nursery and primary pupils and for pupils from special schools. Local schools, from the controlled and maintained sectors, participate jointly in programmes in Parkanaur, undertaking a series of activities to explore the variety of living plants and animals, and the habitats in which they live.

**5. Bio-diversity Outreach Programme:**

The aim of this outreach programme is to help schools to improve biodiversity in their school grounds by implementing a range of sustainable actions including, the composting, wild flower gardening and bird boxes. Each year, a select number of schools who participate in the biodiversity programmes are eligible to avail of Speedwell's outreach service.

**4.0 THE RESPECTING DIVERSITY IN OUR COMMUNITY PROGRAMME**

One of the most recent developmental initiatives within the Speedwell remit has been the pilot programme *Respecting Diversity in our Community*. Developed for Key Stage 2 pupils, the programme will be introduced in the academic year 2009-10, with the associated intention to review, refine and subsequently expand within other school partnerships. During the pilot phase, pupils from five schools in the Moneymore and Ballygawley areas (comprising controlled and maintained schools) participated in the programme.

Within the progressive remit of school-based engagement, the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme is a developmental extension of the *Respecting Diversity*

programme at Foundation Stage/Key Stage 1. For this younger age group, the programme objectives state that children should:

- meet young people from another school and learn each other's names and begin to share ideas around the issues;
- have the opportunity to explore and discuss their own and others feelings and emotions;
- be aware of the concept of diversity and explore and discuss similarities and differences between people;
- have an increased understanding of the variety of cultures who contribute to life in Northern Ireland.

The content of the programme at this stage focuses on three areas:

1. *Friends and Feelings*

This theme has an emphasis on self-awareness and is introduced to help children begin to recognise, name and describe their feelings.

2. *Respecting Diversity*

It is acknowledged that children can develop cultural and racial attitudes at an early age. This theme, therefore, seeks to provide children with opportunities to explore new, real and different situations.

3. *Comparing Diversity*

This phase of the programme at Parkanaur Forest Park re-visits the first two themes and includes diversity trail, wildlife mask and wildlife collage.

Notably, each stage of the programme is strongly developed around a play-based approach to learning that allows children to explore themes through a safe, friendly and relaxed forum. Themes are introduced via a range of warm-up activities, visual aids, emotions puppets, craft work and interactive media.

The progression of the programme at Key Stage 2 is illustrated through a series of developmental objectives stating that children should:

- meet young people from another school and learn each other's names and begin to share ideas around the issues;
- be given the opportunity to identify symbols linked to Northern Ireland and their origin;
- develop skills, knowledge and confidence to understand their own identity, and to respect and understand the identity of others;
- explore the differences and similarities between traditions, groups and different communities within Northern Ireland;
- have an increased understanding of the two main traditions and other significant cultures who contribute to life in Northern Ireland.

At Key Stage 2, the programme content also has three components:

1. *Our Identity*

The initial phase introduces opportunities to explore similarities and differences through a range of activities, for example, the design of individual identity shields and identity boxes.

2. *Cultural Traditions*

This developmental phase enables exploration of symbols in Northern Ireland; discussion of cultural traditions; and associated craft activities.

3. *Religious Diversity*

This phase of the programme has a strong interactive focus. Children have the chance to talk about faiths and religion in Northern Ireland; visit the four main churches; and engage in a follow-up team activity.

## **5.0 THE MANAGEMENT OF THE PROGRAMME**

The management of the *Respecting Diversity* programme falls within the overall administrative structure of the Speedwell Trust organisation. This comprises a Board of Trustees that includes a Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary. The managerial and administrative requirements of Speedwell are overseen on a daily basis by the Trust Manager; a further seven staff members hold individual posts including Education Officer(s); Education Assistant; Environmental Officer; and Education Support Teacher. The Trust Manager is responsible for the day-to-day leadership and management of the organisation. It is a composite role that extends from initial liaison with schools, to the co-ordination of facilitators, development, delivery and evaluation of individual programmes; it also involves strategic planning and development for future schools programmes.

## **6.0 THE FUNDING OF THE PROGRAMME**

The range and diversity of the Speedwell programmes necessitates that the organisation is financially supported from a variety of sources, comprising public and private funding. These include the Australian-Ireland Funds; the Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council; Stichting Het Solidariteitsfonds; the Northern Ireland Environment Agency; and private funding from the Friends of Speedwell network.

Additionally, funding from the Department of Education Community Relations Core Funding Scheme and Schools Community Relations Programme provided financial assistance until March 2007 for the development and delivery of programmes. Approval for this funding is based on the fulfilment of criteria outlined in the applications for core and school funding, namely the development of an age-appropriate programme that meets community relations objectives and that demonstrates engagement with other education providers.

## **7.0 METHODOLOGY AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The purpose of this evaluation is to formulate a developmental strategy to support and inform the work of the Speedwell Trust by identifying key findings in the *Respecting*

*Diversity in our Community* programme and making informed recommendations for its potential position within, and contribution to, the educational and broader societal aspirations of a shared future. This translated into the following key objectives:

1. To outline the educational and policy context of the Speedwell Trust;
2. To identify the aims and objectives of the programme;
3. To explore the development and piloting of the programme within a selected number of partner schools;
4. To consider the contribution of the programme to statutory curricular and broader educational initiatives;
5. To consider benefits of the programme for community relations and mainstream policy;
6. To assess the impact of the programme at individual, school and organisational level;
7. To develop a dissemination strategy that may usefully provide options for progression and sustainability;
8. To identify recommendations and possible strategies for the future direction of programme.

A qualitative process of data collection was considered the most relevant and efficient means of gathering representative pupil and professional perspectives to inform the evaluation. This comprised:

- Initial meetings with the Speedwell Trust Manager to clarify terms of reference and negotiate access to schools;
- Analysis of key documents, including programme outlines, aims and objectives; and action plans;
- Interviews with school principals based on an agreed semi-structured interview schedule;
- Interviews with participating teachers from each school based on an agreed semi-structured interview schedule;
- Whole class and focus group interviews with participating pupils from each school based on an agreed semi-structured interview schedule;
- Observation of school preparation days and principal consultation meeting.

Copies of the interview schedules are attached as Appendix 1.

## **8.0 FINDINGS**

### **8.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAMME**

- The *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme is an evolving pilot initiative and the incentives for involvement are based on existing school partnerships, as well as consideration of the 'added value' the programme can offer in terms of teacher engagement and institutional ownership.
- The commitment to develop a relevant and meaningful programme has been demonstrated through consistently collaborative and co-operative dialogue between all parties involved.
- Principals acknowledged that the invitation to participate in a discrete consultation process underpinned the collaborative approach to the development of the programme. It was considered that the receptiveness of Speedwell staff to constructive feedback confirmed the partnership status of the programme and reinforced the strategic contribution of schools to the development process.
- Principals and teachers agreed that the remit, structure and content of the programme provided all participants with accessible opportunities to investigate concepts of diversity in an open, safe and supportive manner.
- The *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme is representative of an inclusive and collaborative approach to community relations that actively addresses key issues on diversity through a programme that is compatible with, and indeed, is perceived to meet:
  - specific objectives of the revised curriculum and in particular of PDMU;
  - some of the recommendations outlined in broader educational policy – including options for sustainable schools;
  - the aspirational priorities of *A Shared Future*.

- It was agreed that the shared development and co-ordination of the programme between Speedwell staff, principals and teachers was strategically successful in terms of administration, planning and teaching, and that this collaboration enhanced the validity and profile of the programme.
- Interviews with principals and participating teaching staff revealed a genuine commitment to, and support for, the objectives of the *Respecting Diversity* programme. This suggests that the programme is potentially sustainable in participating schools.
- The commitment of principals and participating teachers to what the programme proposed was clearly evident. Overall understandings on the purpose of the programme were articulated in a thoughtful rationale that illustrated professional associations between the organic language of diversity and good relations and the corresponding educational, emotional and social development of children.
- There was a consistent appreciation of the ongoing need for the introduction of community relations work at a young age. It was perceived that the environmental context of school-based activity could:
  - allow pupils to explore, challenge and discuss understandings of diversity;
  - provide alternative perspectives to perceptible traditional viewpoints;
  - nurture the development of educational, emotional and social skills to confidently participate in an increasingly diverse society.
- All of the staff interviewed reported a legacy of professional engagement with community relations programmes and/or associated school initiatives, and a corresponding 'readiness' to participate in the programme. The willingness of teachers to assume a key facilitator role was particularly commended.
- Perhaps the defining characteristic of the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme is the expectation for direct teacher involvement. This creative approach has revitalised existing partnerships between schools and has nurtured institutional capacity for leadership in the area of diversity and good relations.

## 8.2 THE CONTENT OF THE PROGRAMME

- The content of the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme is nominally designed by Speedwell staff. However, although a programme outline is presented to schools within a diversity framework, it remains sufficiently flexible to adaptation, depending on individual school needs.
- Negotiation on content was a consistent feature of the programme and teachers welcomed the opportunity to seek clarity and offer suggestions. It was generally acknowledged that this level of engagement in the developmental process (particularly given teachers' knowledge of pupils) strengthened the pedagogical character of the programme and enhanced the capacity for institutional ownership.
- Teachers and principals agreed that the content of the programme was relevant, comprehensive, age-appropriate and complementary to curricular and broader educational objectives.
- School staff interviews also suggested that the design of sequential, participative and potentially transferable learning situations secured the status of the programme within institutional culture and classroom practice.
- All school staff agreed that there is a continuing need to address diversity issues. The historical and contemporary nature of difference was viewed as equally important; it was considered that programmes such as *Respecting Diversity in our Community* could effectively introduce children to perspectives of difference that they otherwise may not experience.
- Teachers and pupils commented on the intrinsic value of joint school activities. At the same time, it was acknowledged that logistical and practical constraints – for example, the established timetables of school buses – meant that on a few occasions activities had to be completed by individual schools. In these instances, however, the strategic co-facilitation function of the teacher and his/her capacity to complete the activity at a later date was endorsed as a



successful example of the inherent expectation for sustained and progressive practice.

- The learning strategies applied during the course of the programme were commended by principals and teachers. It was commonly agreed that these provided reciprocal benefits for everyone involved in the programme:
  - Teachers acquired additional skills in negotiation and facilitation that they felt confident to use within the classroom environment (including the transfer of these skills to other subject areas);
  - Speedwell staff acquired critical insight and understanding of teaching techniques advocated through the revised curriculum;
  - Pupils' talking and listening skills were deepened along with their aptitude for empathy and inter-dependence.
- Pupils were unanimously positive in their assessment of the programme and demonstrated sound understanding of its purpose. Familiarity with the language of diversity was evident in pupil observations that knowledgeably applied learning situations to historical and contemporary contexts. In addition, the less formal nature of the programme and the associated opportunities for new friendships were recurrently cited.
- Teachers confirmed the positive outcomes of contact encounters amongst pupils and endorsed the short and long term cognitive, emotional and social rewards that such engagement could produce. For these teachers, the apparent lack of pupil inhibition in discussing perceptibly sensitive subject matter reinforced the value of introducing diversity work at a young age.

### **8.3 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME**

- All staff commended the receptive manner in which pupils from each school willingly participated in the programme. The enthusiasm demonstrated by pupils was noted by teachers, in particular, their openness to explore and discuss a

range of diversity issues with 'others'. This was considered a fundamental example of the continued relevance and value of the programme.

- For teachers, attention to the progressive and complementary nature of the programme was an important consideration. The dissemination of certain themes and/or activities from the programme into mainstream lessons was perceived to:
  - consolidate the recommended curricular pedagogy for connected learning;
  - reinforce an institutional culture compatible with the objectives of the new curriculum;
  - illustrate professional and institutional responsiveness to the policy aims of school development and good relations.
- The centrality of teachers' learning was considered a fundamental component of the programme. Encouragingly, staff members were extremely responsive to the implicit professional development that the programme promotes and welcomed its participative nature. For these teachers, the value of engaging with colleagues on diversity issues – and, in some cases, experiencing new situations – was unequivocally rewarding.
- Teachers responded positively to their facilitation role and identified the merits of this, including:
  - the collaborative consultation with Speedwell and the sensitive and supportive manner in which programme content and teacher participation was negotiated;
  - the professional development opportunities that participation in the programme offered;
  - the associated professional ownership that participation conferred;
  - the potential 'transferability' of acquired knowledge and skills to other teachers and/or curriculum areas.

- The contribution of Speedwell staff was recurrently endorsed by all interviewees. Principals and teachers perceived that such input served a pivotal function, and there was general acknowledgement that the development and implementation of the programme was enhanced by this strategic involvement.
- The support provided by Speedwell staff was perceived as a developmental essential for a number of reasons:
  - external involvement reinforced the community relations remit of the programme;
  - the support of skilled facilitators ensured that teachers felt sufficiently prepared and confident to assume their complementary role in the programme;
  - the co-ordination of necessary – but time-consuming – organisational practicalities minimised the administrative burden on schools and ensured the smooth operation of the programme.
- Speedwell has been consistent in applying a process of formative and summative evaluation. In particular, the development of the programme in consultation with principals and teachers, and the organisation of a principal consultation day represent a consistent audit of practice that has provided a valuable contribution to the structure and future development of the programme.

#### **8.4 THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PROGRAMME**

- The ongoing commitment of principals and participating teachers was a significant strength of the programme. This has been most visible in the process of collegiality, collaboration, openness, and supportive leadership within and between schools. Additionally, the collaborative relationships forged between Speedwell and schools, between teachers from partner schools, and between staff and pupils was a recurrent observation during the period of the evaluation.
- Principals and teachers have willingly embraced this educational initiative that actively seeks to address historical and contemporary issues within an

increasingly diverse society. Equally, the contribution of the programme to the overall objectives of the revised curriculum and of PDMU was considered particularly valuable.

- Staff members were very positive about the collaborative opportunities that engagement with other schools offered and identified a series of productive outcomes that included:
  - The prospect of additional school partnerships and/or clusters;
  - The reduction in institutional and/or professional isolation;
  - The opportunity to maximise teacher expertise (particularly in small schools);
  - The potential of the programme to initiate and/or develop stronger community participation.
- The collective expertise of the Speedwell facilitators and the teachers was considered a key strength in the implementation of the programme. In particular, the professional nature of the collaboration and a mutual willingness to engage with, and learn from, peers were recurrent observations.
- Teachers acknowledged that the contextual nature of their involvement in the programme offered genuine opportunities for both personal and professional development that hitherto may not have occurred. Through their co-facilitator role, the opportunity to discuss issues with each other emerged as a valuable by-product of joint school activities.
- The perceived limitations of the programme were largely directed towards the logistical difficulty of completing activities in partner schools, particularly when time was constrained by established transport arrangements.
- There was some suggestion that the final phase of the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme should take place in churches in the immediate locality of schools. It was considered that this arrangement would offer greater relevance to pupils and would effectively identify the programme within the wider

community. It is acknowledged that Speedwell staff has begun to address this suggestion.

- It was also considered that the community potential of the programme had yet to be fully explored. Teachers and principals considered that although pupil opportunities to meet peers outside had increased, the contact dimension of the programme was still confined to the immediate school environment. The prospect of greater integration within the wider community was considered a valuable extension of the programme.

## **8.5 THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME**

- Given schools' historical involvement in community relations initiatives, including longstanding collaboration with Speedwell, there is an apparent willingness to sustain the programme as part of whole-school practice. Staff and pupils expressed a hope that the programme should continue to operate.
- Interviews with principals and teachers suggested that the collaborative design of the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme has demonstrated a collective commitment to maintain current momentum. In particular, the associated professional development of teachers and the strength of school partnerships had strengthened institutional perceptions of ownership.
- The introduction of the programme in Key Stage 2 (and the corresponding initiative at Key Stage 1) represents a concerted commitment on the part of schools to ensure that pupils receive a meaningful community relations experience. Importantly, the programme is not perceived to sit in isolation; rather, it is defined as a core element of a broader whole-school community relations agenda that ensures pupil participation throughout each year group.
- Undoubtedly, the prospective re-constitution of community relations funding emerging from the Departmental policy review, and the impact of this on sustainability is an important consideration for the longevity of the programme. Notwithstanding the financial support from a range of public and private

sponsors, school participation has relied consistently on Departmental Community Relations funding. It was generally perceived that the future sustainability of the programme may be constrained as part of any revised fiscal policy.

- Principals and teachers reported that the programme has enduring support amongst the parents of those pupils involved. Although it was acknowledged that reservations around cross community were been voiced in the past, it was agreed that the transparency in both design and delivery had ensured sustained support for the remit of the programme.
- The educational validity of the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme was strongly advocated, with reference to an accepted understanding that children could develop mis-construed or prejudiced behaviours at an early stage. It was agreed that the primary sector had a particularly strategic role in introducing diversity issues through curricular, pastoral and non-formal activity.
- It was agreed that opportunities existed to promote and expand the programme within local communities. Opportunities for cross-community activities – for example, through the Diversity in Sport - were strongly endorsed as a starting point.
- Principals and teachers agreed that increased visibility of the programme within local communities (for example, through visits to local churches) would enhance its profile and further consolidate the notion of ‘shared’ ownership.

## **9.0. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is clear that the *Respecting Diversity* pilot initiative has offered participating schools a genuine opportunity to engage in collaborative approaches to community relations and diversity within the primary sector. The relationship between Speedwell and the schools has combined two fundamental priorities for meaningful engagement. Firstly, the collaborative nature of the initiative represented the simple, yet strategic, importance of a

joined endeavour that consistently sought to meet the needs of individual schools; secondly, the use of teachers as facilitators sought to shift the historical balance of school-based community relations work whilst simultaneously engendering institutional ownership.

The rationale of the Speedwell initiative is concurrent with ongoing changes within education - not least in the purpose of education, and in the associated processes of teaching and learning. Professional development for the full implementation of the new curriculum is still ongoing; this has undoubtedly presented teachers and school leaders with alternative approaches to how teachers teach and how pupils learn. It is an evolving process of transformation that offers a myriad of potentially productive opportunities for schools to review and refine their culture, ethos and practice in addressing diversity. The inherent potential for voluntary organisations such as Speedwell to assume an informative and strategic role in this process of change represents an immediate and longer term contribution to formal education.

The findings of the evaluation suggest that the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme has a number of informative strengths that should usefully provide evidence of its educational merits and establish its potential sustainability within the formal education sector. However, there are also several issues for consideration with reference to the strategic development and longevity of the programme.

A collective representation of the recommendations, then, will seek to inform future planning for the programme within schools. They include a series of immediate and longer-term goals for the organisational development of the programme. It is also anticipated that the recommendations may inform at systemic level: as an endorsement of the validity of community relations activity in schools; as a case study of the enhanced curricular benefits of collaborative formal and non-formal partnerships; and as a commentary for funding agencies.

Broadly, the recommendations have sought to inform the prospective direction of the programme with reference to four key areas:

1. The sustainability of the programme

2. The strategic development of the programme
3. The location of the programme in schools
4. The programme and the policy environment

## 9.1 THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME

- It is clear that the capacity of Speedwell to provide quality educational experiences to participating schools has been dependent on commensurate levels of funding. The continuation of adequate fiscal support is essential if standards of good practice are to be maintained; critically, this includes sufficient remuneration to retain core staff for the efficient development, implementation and sustainability of the programme.
- Financial support establishes the credentials of the programme and validates its contribution to curricular and broader educational objectives. This includes the compatibility of the programme with the revised curriculum, but also its strategic contribution to wider education policy and reform. It is important, therefore, that funding continues.
- Although the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme is a pilot initiative, it is clear that the Speedwell Trust will have several management issues to consider if it is to successfully expand. This requires strategic planning to:
  - Audit market need, identifying potential partner schools;
  - Consider any prospective recruitment costs;
  - Review and refine the relevance and compatibility of the programme:
    1. specifically to the core objectives of the revised curriculum, particularly PDMU;
    2. generally to educational and social reform;
    3. consistently to the policy of good relations
  - Nurture existing relationships with schools (particularly given the unique facilitation expectation) in order to build the capacity of teachers to enter the programme.



- It is inevitable that the future of the programme will be directed by available funding, resources and staff. This, in turn, will define how and where expansion occurs. There are several possibilities:
  - To use the existing cohort of schools to underpin new partnerships, there by ensuring that one partner school will have already been through the programme;
  - To explore the viability of a network of cluster schools (particularly in rural areas and/or with smaller schools) as a means to maximise pupil/teacher experiences of the programme;
  - To consider the use past teacher facilitators as a potential source of peer mentoring to other teachers engaging in the programme.
- It is important that any expansion of the programme is overseen by a dedicated co-ordinator (or field worker) who can provide valuable support and continuity between participating schools and Speedwell Trust. The premise of core staff would provide valuable support in a number of ways:
  - It establishes organisational commitment to the programme with schools and with other agencies;
  - It reinforces dual teaching and learning processes that are both community relations and curriculum-based;
  - It identifies a named contact who can assist schools in the development of the programme as well as provide reassurance to teachers preparing to participate;
  - It creates an opportunity to foster new and/or stronger relationships with schools, with the option to participate in the programme at a later date.

## 9.2 THE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAMME

- The *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme provides fundamental evidence of the evolving work of the Speedwell Trust. It is acknowledged that the organisation has a historical legacy of community relations work within

primary schools; this pilot initiative, however, represents not just an ongoing commitment to good relations and respect for diversity in Northern Ireland; it also showcases a process of collaborative, co-facilitation that has hitherto not been common practice in much school-based work. This innovative element should remain a core remit of the programme.

- There is little doubt of organisational and school commitment to the continued position and contribution of Speedwell within the formal primary education sector. It is important that the remit of the organisation maintains an informed and strategic focus that continues to reflect the changing constitution of education and the evolving diversity of our society. It is equally important that any revised remit should seek to maximise staff (and teacher) expertise productively and creatively so that the richness of individual programmes is maintained.
- The inclusion of teachers as facilitators who alternately share and lead *respecting diversity* activities has been a defining feature of the programme. The nature of this engagement has provided successful experiential evidence of inclusive school involvement. It is important that this model of participation remains a non-negotiable expectation of the programme.
- A further defining characteristic of the programme is the potential transferability of teacher-acquired skills to other environmental and curricular contexts and to other age groups. This is a significant strength that Speedwell should seek to explicitly promote in school literature.
- The option to maximise school autonomy and ownership merits further exploration. It is a developmental consideration that, in time, may encourage a whole-school or 'core' school group of facilitators who can confidently deliver the programme to a range of pupils. As part of the process, teachers who have participated in the programme can (through an initial process of support and monitoring from Speedwell staff) cascade training to colleagues.

- This option has two benefits:
  - It removes any perception that the programme is an individual responsibility;
  - It consolidates the profile of the programme as a whole-school, cross-curricular initiative.
  
- Educational policy reform has consistently acknowledged the two-way transfer of skills and expertise between the formal and non-formal sectors. Participation in the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme has given schools a certain freedom within the systemic parameters of the formal curriculum. This has been a beneficial arrangement in which both Speedwell and schools have engaged in a mutual process of teaching and learning. On the one hand, Speedwell has acquired a particular insight into the specific and sometimes subtle detail of formal curriculum expectations and benefitted from teacher knowledge of individual pupils' knowledge, needs and backgrounds; on the other hand, teachers and pupils have experienced the creativity and flexibility of less formal approaches to learning. It is recommended that Speedwell highlights the 'added value' of shared expertise in promotional literature as a key criterion of schools' work in diversity and good relations.
  
- Speedwell has sought to ensure that, through ongoing consultation with schools, the programme content accommodates institutional contexts. Any expansion, therefore, should seek to remain sufficiently responsive and flexible whilst retaining a core remit to the fundamental values of community relations.
  
- It follows, therefore, that promotion of the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme should be a priority for any future development strategy. The targeted audience should include schools, but also the wider educational environment, including the Department of Education, Education and Library Boards (ELBs), Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and other voluntary organisations. Promotional literature should specify the contribution of the programme to:
  - The philosophy and practice of good relations;

- The core objectives of broader education policy,
  - The specific objectives of the revised curriculum;
  - The intellectual, social and emotional development of pupils;
  - The training and support of teachers.
- There is also some merit in exploring the advantages of a promotional information booklet for prospective school partnerships. This publication should identify for principals and teachers the contribution of the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme towards broader educational policy recommendations, institutional planning, and teaching and learning. This should include reference to:
    - The development of whole-school initiatives;
    - School development planning;
    - Sustainable schools;
    - Personal Development and Mutual Understanding;
    - Broader good relations policy (eg A Shared Future);
    - Alternative teaching methodologies;
    - Professional development.

### **9.3 THE LOCATION OF THE PROGRAMME WITHIN SCHOOLS**

- A defining success criterion of the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme has been the involvement of school principals from the outset. The commitment of senior management is recurrently acknowledged as a visible endorsement of educational initiatives and as a crucial indicator for their status and longevity within schools and in the wider community. The current process of direct dialogue with senior management should remain a fundamental preparatory and developmental criterion of the programme.
- The character and ethos of schools are defined by the composite influences of location, pupil demographics, staff, parents and community backdrop. This, in turn, will impact on the institutional capacity, willingness and readiness to undertake a developmental programme such as *Respecting Diversity in our*

*Community.* It is important, therefore, that the Speedwell Trust continues to negotiate a programme where content matches individual institutional needs whilst retaining the expectation for teacher participation and school ownership.

- The broader educational credentials of the programme may be enhanced through explicit inclusion in school development planning. In this context, Speedwell's strategic contribution to enriching the educational, social and cultural experiences for pupils would effectively help formalise schools' agenda for community relations work and provide tangible evidence of a concurrent institutional commitment to fostering collaborative educational links within both the formal and non formal sector. There are several benefits to such an approach:
  - It stipulates a schools institutional, professional and pastoral position with regard to community relations activity;
  - It necessitates an associated commitment to further teachers' professional development in this area;
  - It underlines the inherent expectation of partnership as a fundamental and organic element of education;
  - It emphasises the continued educational and social relevance of community relations work.
- Additionally, explicit reference within School Development Plans ensures that any community relations agenda is promoted as an ongoing whole-school strategy. In this way, the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme has the potential to occupy a niche position within a progressive framework. This is an important consideration since it safeguards any perception of the programme as a one-off or stand-alone activity, and establishes its credentials with teachers, pupils and parents.
- The community relations dimension of the School Development Plan may, in some instances, be presented as an incremental strategy, whereby the initial involvement of individual staff members is gradually widened to include 'core' and/or whole school participation. For some schools, particularly those with little

experience of diversity work, this is a progressive approach that still carries the expectation for professional autonomy and institutional ownership. For other schools, it safeguards that a particular expertise is not lost through the practical attrition of staff retirement or re-location.

- Professional development relating to sensitive/controversial issues has been identified as a continued need for teachers working within a community relations remit. The capacity of NGOs and other voluntary agencies to effectively support teachers in the introduction and delivery of potentially difficult issues cannot, and should not, be overlooked. It is important, therefore, that Speedwell:
  - Continues to actively promote its particular expertise within the formula of any revised policy framework;
  - Audits and records school demand for dedicated support in this area, including identification particular institutional needs;
  - Makes explicit reference in promotional literature to the complementary links between the objectives of its programme(s) and those of the revised curriculum.
- Consideration should be given to the recruitment of new schools as a developmental strand within the existing programme. This would provide opportunities to explore the potential to expand the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme without adding excessively to the workload of Speedwell staff. This has several advantages:
  - Collaboration with an existing school facilitates a 'nurturing' process, so that one partner school will have already been through the facilitation process;
  - Such collaboration would provide a strategic and supportive professional partnership that may not be as readily achieved with two new schools;
  - It represents an effective use of existing partnerships, for example, using teachers and pupils as ambassadors for the programme with other schools, and as case studies of good practice;

- It is an arrangement that exemplifies Departmental recommendations for clustering arrangements and shared teacher expertise as a means to enhance the educational experiences of pupils.

Clearly, each of these options would have to be carefully considered, discussed, developed and monitored at organisational level.

- It is acknowledged that ongoing consultation with principals and teachers has provided Speedwell with professional feedback from which to review, evaluate and refine the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme. It is important that this continues; in particular, that a strategic evaluation of each partnership is undertaken consistently and in consultation with participating schools. This is a valuable aspect of developmental planning:
  - At organisational level, since it critically informs future development options;
  - At school level, since it devolves partial ownership to the process of formative and summative assessment;
  - At policy level, since it demonstrates the good relations credentials and validity of the programme.

#### **9.4 THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT**

- Recommendations around the educational and broader social contribution of the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme are considered with reference to its position within a revised educational infrastructure, and a potentially reformed funding system.
- The findings have clearly suggested that this is a programme with opportunities for further two-way collaboration and co-operation between schools and the local community. The potential to maximise community involvement has begun to be explored by Speedwell staff, notably through their Diversity in Sport programme. It is an initiative that demonstrates an organisational commitment to make programmes as meaningful as possible. This endeavour for outward activity

between Speedwell, schools and the community is recognition of the need to embed diversity work within the locality in which young people live. It is important that commitment to explore wider community options continues.

- The prospect of contributing to the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) environment is a commitment that Speedwell may decide is outside their remit. However, it is a developmental approach that offers teachers in school partnerships the opportunity to refine and/or acquire the skills and confidence to undertake similar work; to motivate and support the learning of others; and to contribute to institutional and community change. The developmental component of a progressive programme with participating schools could effectively offer teachers an opportunity to continue to refine their facilitation skills. This has several advantages:
  - It empowers schools to effectively address sensitive/difficult issues at an early age;
  - It represents an active and visible contribution to the institutional vision for community relations and diversity as set down in the School Development Plan;
  - It is a developmental opportunity that may be explored further within the formal framework of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA).
- In association with any strategy that Speedwell may develop around continuing professional development for teachers, the prospective merits of forging and/or strengthening links with other education partners (for example, ELBs and ITE providers) may be worth considering as part of a longer term development plan.
- Links with colleagues in the formal education sector offer a series of potential developmental opportunities:
  - A more visible profile for the work and contribution of NGOs and other voluntary agencies within formal education;
  - Contribution to the delivery of active teaching methodologies;



- Enhanced understanding of educational requirements within the formal primary sector – including the criteria for teacher competencies;
  - Collaborative opportunities to engage with education partners in the development of a foundation programme for diversity and good relations.
- Similarly, a strategic development plan should promote the associated relationship between the philosophy of the *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme and organic institutional culture. Identification of the programme as a *whole-school* and *school improvement* initiative may strengthen its profile and sustainability within schools, with parents and with the wider community.

## 10.0 CONCLUSION

It is intended that this evaluation will inform the developmental plans of the Speedwell Trust. The *Respecting Diversity in our Community* programme has now completed its pilot phase. It is clear that the remit, structure and content of the programme have yielded professional and personal benefits for everyone involved. In particular, the process of collaboration and co-operation around which the programme evolved has defined how schools perceive their role in the development, implementation and support of good relations work; it has also defined the relevance of the programme to institutional culture, to the curricular objectives for teaching and learning, and to broader social policy reform. As the work of Speedwell continues to develop, the premise of a collaborative culture of shared expertise should remain a core organisational criterion.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **PRINCIPAL/TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **1. Rationale**

- How did the school (you) become involved in the programme?
- How would you define the purpose of the programme?
- What previous (current) involvement has the school had in community relations activity?

#### **2. Delivery**

- Who is point of contact for Speedwell staff?
- How has the programme been developed/
- What do hope to be the outcome of participating in this programme?
- What benefits do you think the school, the teachers and the pupils will gain?
- How important has it been to talk to children about difficult/sensitive issues?
- How can programmes like this contribute to primary education?
- What have been the most positive outcomes?
- Have there been any limiting factors?
- How has it impacted on the wider community?

#### **3. Sustainability**

- Will contact with Speedwell be maintained on completion of the programme?
- Do you think the programme can be sustained within your school (with or without Speedwell)?
- What is needed (if anything) for a sustainable programme?
- Do you think that there is a need for diversity and community relations work in schools?

## PUPIL QUESTIONS

1. Can we make a list of all the things you did on the Programme?
2. Why do you think your school took part in this programme with another school?
3. What have you learned about other cultures/traditions?
  - a. Was there anything you thought really interesting?
  - b. Was there anything you didn't enjoy?
4. What things have you learned about the other school?
5. What do you think the other school learned about you?
6. Do you think it would be a good idea to stay in touch with the other school?
7. What was your favourite part of the programme?
8. What was your least favourite?
9. Would you like to do a programme like this again?
10. Can you help us make a list of things that would make the Programme a better one?